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JOHN FLETCHER AND THE *GESTA ROMANORUM*

Some years ago I pointed out (*Mod. Lang. Notes* xxiv, 76-77) the fact that the dénouement (Act v, sc. 4) of *The Queen of Corinth* by Fletcher, Massinger, and Field is derived from the tale of the two maidens and their seducer found in the *Gesta Romanorum* (Early English Text Society, Extra Series 33, p. 440). This story presents the rival claims of two maidens violated by the same man. When the man is brought to trial, each of the maidens invokes one of the alternative penalties of a law which permitted the injured party to choose whether she would have the offender killed or would have him make reparation through marriage. In all essentials the scene in the play follows the story.

A later reading of the plays that appear under the names of Beaumont and Fletcher has convinced me that the above-mentioned story is not the only one borrowed by Fletcher and his collaborators from the *Gesta Romanorum*. In Act iv, sc. 5 of the *Loyal Subject*,—a play for which Fletcher is solely responsible,—Archas is threatened with death because of an offence that “carries a strangeness in the circumstance,” to quote the phrase of Borosky, the accuser. The circumstance so strange bears too striking an analogy to the story in the *Gesta Romanorum* entitled “Emperor Titus (Of the Knight Who Saved a City and Was Ungratefully Put to Death by Some of Its Inhabitants)” to make it likely that the resemblance is accidental. The story is printed by the Early English Text Society, Extra Series 33, p. 9. The essential incidents common to both the story and the scene in the play are these: A warrior is entreated by the inhabitants of a community, threatened with destruction by an enemy, to rise in its defense. Having no other equipment available, he borrows armor, the use of which is forbidden under penalty of death. He defeats the enemy and saves from destruction the people in whose interest he has put on the armor. Nevertheless, he is accused by malicious individuals within the community, who demand the enforcement of the law. In his own defense he pleads that his deed is an honorable one, that had he failed to make use of the forbidden armor, all would have been destroyed. According to the version in the *Gesta*, the

judge dismisses the charge, but "the false traitours that accused him slowe" the knight. Fletcher, however, finds a more happy solution for his loyal subject, who not only escapes with his life but becomes the father-in-law of his sovereign.

Owing to the fact that in the two instances above cited the *Gesta* clearly served as the source of scenes in the dramas, I am emboldened to suggest that to some extent the tale entitled "Dolfinus a Wise Emperoure (How a Prophecy Was Fulfilled)" influenced the plot, especially the dénouement (Act v, sc. 4) of the plot, of *A King and No King*. Prof. Ashley H. Thorndike has ingeniously suggested (*The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakspeare*, p. 82) that in a passage of Fauchet's *Les Antiquitez et Histoires Gauloises et Françoises* and the situation developed from it in *Thierry and Theodoret* we have the source of *A King and No King*, and such a conclusion seems to me well sustained. But it is not impossible, in my opinion, that the story from the *Gesta* may have had a contributing influence. The points of similarity between the story in the *Gesta* and in *A King and No King* are as follows: In both accounts a newly-born male child is taken from its parents by order of a ruler: in *A King and No King* by Arene, the queen, who desires to deceive the king into believing that it is a child of her own; in "Dolfinus" by the emperor himself on the plea that he wants to nourish it in his palace. In both accounts the child is the prospective heir to the throne: in *A King and No King* because, as a result of the queen's deception, he is believed to be the eldest born of the royal blood; in "Dolfinus" by virtue of a prophetic dream. In both accounts the child stands in the way of the rightful heir to the throne, a daughter (who is already in existence in "Dolfinus" and in *A King and No King* is born subsequent to the adoption); and in each case the child incurs the deadly hatred of the royal parent. The queen in *A King and No King* and Dolfinus in the story so entitled attempt the life of the child but fail in achieving their wicked purpose. Finally in both accounts the difficulty is solved by marrying the rightful heir (the daughter) to the child (now grown to manhood) that innocently stood in the way of her attainment of the throne. The story of "Dolfinus" is printed by the Early English Text Society, Extra Series 33, pp. 206-216.

If the impression above conveyed that the story of Dolfinus influ-

enced the dramatists be accepted, some general conclusions are permissible regarding the use of the three sources cited. In two cases, that of *The Queen of Corinth* and *A King and No King*, the derived story is applied in the dénouement, introducing an element of surprise and giving a startling culmination to the plot, at the same time smoothing out difficulties that seemed insurmountable. In the case of *The Loyal Subject* the borrowed story is introduced at a turning point in the plot and precipitates the solution. All three sources have, therefore, a vital structural part in the dramas.

I have preferred to speak of the dramatists as being collectively borrowers from the *Gesta* where more than one hand was engaged in the writing rather than to assign the credit exclusively to Fletcher. While verse and other tests have enabled critics to discriminate between the contributions of the collaborators, the task of determining their respective parts in the construction as distinguished from the writing of any particular drama presents greater difficulties. Nevertheless, such evidence, admittedly not final, as can be applied weighs in favor of Fletcher. In the first place, as the exclusive author of *The Loyal Subject*, he was solely responsible for the borrowing in that play. *The Loyal Subject* is very close in sequence if not actually contiguous to *The Queen of Corinth*. *The Queen of Corinth* was probably acted early in 1618 and *The Loyal Subject* was licensed by Buck November 16 of the same year (Fleay, *Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*, I, 206). One is tempted, in view of this fact, to conjecture that Fletcher, a short time before or during the composition of these plays, was reading or rereading the *Gesta* and was responsible for the introduction of the story in *The Queen of Corinth* as well as in *The Loyal Subject*.

Scene 4 of Act v of *A King and No King*, in which occurs the situation that to some extent may have been influenced by the story of "Dolfinus," critics are practically unanimous in assigning to Beaumont. Scene 2 of Act III of *Thierry and Theodoret*, in which a parallel passage occurs, is probably also his. Very much the same situation occurs, however, after a lapse of years in Act III, sc. 2 of *The Maid in the Mill*,—a play in which Beaumont, being then dead, could not have had a part. Fleay assigns this scene to Fletcher (*Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*, I, 217). On the authority of Herrick "the rare plot" of *A King and No*

King was Fletcher's achievement. It may well be, therefore, that though scene 4 of Act v of *A King and No King* was written by Beaumont, it was conceived by Fletcher.

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KEATS: *The Eve of St. Mark*

In *The Bookman* (London) for October, 1906 (pp. 16-17), there was printed for the first time an interesting fragment of Keats's poetry, found by Mr. H. Buxton Forman in a scrap-book belonging to a Mr. Frank T. Sabin. The fragment is a rejected passage of *The Eve of St. Mark*, and runs as follows (I copy as exactly as possible the photographic reproduction in *The Bookman*):

Gif ye wol stonden hardie wight—
 Amiddes of the blacke night—
 Right in the churchè porch, pardie
 Ye wol behold a companie
 Appouchen thee full dolourouse
 For sooth to sain from everich house
 Be it in City or village
 Wol come the Phantom and image
 Of ilka gent and ilka carle
 Whom coldè Deathè hath in parle
 And wol some day that very year
 Touchen with foulè venime spear
 And sadly do them all to die—
 Hem all shalt thou see verilie—
 And everichon shall by thee pass
 All who must die that year Alas

The lines are in Keats's handwriting, much corrected, as though this were the first draft of them; they are immediately followed, says Mr. Forman (*Poetical Works of John Keats*, Oxford, 1910, p. 1),¹ by lines 99 ff. of the poem as it usually stands—

—Als writith he of swevenis,
 Men han beforn they wake in bliss,
 Whanne that hir friendes thinke hem bound
 In crimped shroude farre under grounde;

¹ See also *The Bookman*, October, 1906, p. 16.